2; Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6



letters. His high standing in the village, and his contacts with people of influence and power outside it, led people to turn to him for advice. He was asked to represent them in their relations with the outside world. In this capacity he served his parishioners as lawyer, banker and business adviser. He was also the traditional dispenser of charity.

The increasing literacy of the people and their ever-widening range of contacts outside the limits of the parish has somewhat reduced their dependence upon the parish priest. The State's recent involvement in welfare and charity has further weakened it. But if this dependence has been reduced, it has most certainly not been eliminated. Many still call on him to divide inheritances, to argue their claims against the government or to plead with prospective employers, and not a few expect him to be able to secure better roads, new schools, sewerage and playgrounds.

Thus the parish priest is the village's chief spokesman, and many still refer to him as *il-principal tar-rahal*, 'the head of the village'. The government has long recognized this, and makes use of him as a convenient contact with the people. Each Sunday morning, in addition to his own official announcements, the parish priest reads from the altar government notices advising the people of forthcoming elections, immunization campaigns, agricultural extension lectures and so on.

But if the parish priest performs numerous services for his parishioners, both individually and collectively, he has also the power to refuse them. The sanctions with which he can punish disobedience are considerable. They range from declining to write a good conduct certificate to denying absolution in confession. On the other hand, he has the power to give rewards for services rendered. Aside from doing favours for people who have helped him, he can appoint them to offices which confer prestige and authority and, in some cases, are also financially rewarding. All this serves to underline and reinforce his position as a leader in the community.

Parish priests are usually outsiders, but the rest of the village clergy are natives of the communities in which they live. Unlike Catholic priests in Britain or the United States, who live in presbyteries, the diocesan clergy of Malta and Gozo live at home with their relatives. This means that they remain in constant contact with the village. They are often called on to take part in family

565 The landed classes in Malta and particularly the nobility have never taken any considerable part in the communal life of the villages in which they maintain their country seats and draw rents from the lands which they own. They have always been more urban than rural and more European than Maltese. A [793] squirearchy on the English pattern has been lacking, and the functions which, in the English village, fell to the squire have, in Malta, come within the wide range of activities of the Parish Priest.

621 Apart from the clergy[10] and the gentry, the greater part 795 of the population of the traditional village in Malta was made 565 up of the peasantry deriving their livelihood directly or indirectly from the land or in some cases the sea. Within this section of the community homogeneity was the keynote. There was one Church. All the populace were Church members and [203] attended the same services at the same times each day of every week. The Church could therefore be the centre of diffusion of news to the villagers - both relating to farming and to general affairs in and out of the village.

621 Within the village the peasant and his family, patriarchal, 565 patrilineal and patrilocal, worked the few tmien of land held 241 on rent or lease: rarely was much of it owned by the cultivator. 423 The work of the farm and of the household went on as a single [611] unit (Section 2). The two were often located within the same [591] cluster of buildings (Case VI, v. Plan). Clearly some farmers were richer than others, some had more land, some more animals, but accepted stratification within the village went no further than this: there was no middle class between priest and farmer.

628 For the peasant, the bounds of his regular experience 197 were the limits of the village. Contact between villages, even where close together, was slight and invariably less than that between the individual village and Valletta. Evidence of this is found in the dialect differences between villages but equally illuminating is the fact that the basic dialect distinction that can be made is that between the Urban area, with its Italianized vocabulary and intonation, and the rural parts of the Islands with their characteristically broader vowels, harsher gutturals and fewer European words and idioms (B/Aquilina,J). Language is but one aspect of rural culture in the Maltese Islands which reveals the essential independence of the village within the traditional rural 628 scene. Village patriotism is expressed in inter-Parish 186 rivalry and in a variety of regional reputations, proverbs, [794] and local lore. Thus the shrewdness of the inhabitants of Rabat is revealed by the saying that "A man from Rabat is worth two Jews"[12]. The men of Żebbuġ (Malta) are acknowledged to be merchants par excellence however, while those of Qormi

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6



527 which time the Senators, as well as the
43 knights and other great men, brought
191 gifts to the Emperor, and in his absence to the Capitol (1).

527 It is also the custom in some places
797 of Malta for men to go about strewing some lime in the door-ways on New Year's day. Some idea of good luck may perhaps be associated with the lime; there is no tradition, however, as far as is known, whence this custom arose.

527 New Year's greetings in the shape
•203 of visiting cards, are very profusely exchanged on this occasion, especially among the better classes.

527 Groups of street musicians go from
43 house to house, either on the last day
533 of the old year or on the morning of

(1) Capitol, the temple of Jupiter at Rome built on the top of a hill.